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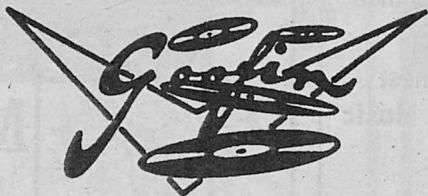
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JC's 1999 ART & GRIT PICKS

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4= **The Derailers: Full Western Dress (Sire) *PD**
The Very Best Of Robbie Fulks (Bloodshot) *SG
Kristi Rose: This Is Pulp Country (Pulp Country) *DF
Buddy Miller: Cruel Moon (Hightone) *JS
Sally Timms: Cowboy Sally's Twilight Laments (Bloodshot) *DT
5= **Brian Burns: Angels & Outlaws (Bandera) *LB**
Don Edwards: Saddle Songs (Western Jubilee/Shanachie) *ER
Last Train Home: True North (Adult Swim) *JH
Mike Ness: Under The Influences (Time Bomb)
Rolling Hayseeds: No Place like Home (Record Cellar) *BC
Three Bad Jacks: Made Of Stone (Boston Krown) *JE
VA: Poor Little Knitter On The Road (Bloodshot) *TJ
VA: Sunshine State Swing (Country Routes) *WH

ONE-OFFS

Johnny Allen: Essential Collection Vol 2; Danny Barnes And His Oft-Mended
Rainment; Belle Starr: Nobody You'd Know; Bill & Audrey: Looking Back
To See; Norman Blake: Far Away, Down On A Georgia Farm; Tanya Rea
Brown: Meet The Mrs; Ed Burleson: My Perfect World; Rip Carson & The
Twilight Trio; Deke Dickerson & The Ecco-Fonics: More Million Sellers;
Richard Dobson: Global Village Garage; Steve Earle: Exit 0; Frog Holler:
Adams Hotel Road; Terri Hendrix: Wilory Farm; J Byrd Hosch & The
Kountry Kays: Cat O'Nine Tails; Long John Hunter: Swingin' From The
Rafters; Josie Kreuzer: As Is; Li'l Mo & The Monicats: Hearts in My Dream;
Dave Mallett: Ambition; Beverly Mayes: Keep The Good Earth Whole; T-
Roy Miller: Junction Three-Twelve; Brent Mitchell: Fallen Angel Palace; Dave
Moore: Breaking Down To 3; Teddy Morgan & The Pistolas: Lost Love &
Highways; Tom Morrell & The Time Warp Tophands: How The West Was
Swing Vol 1; RB Morris: Zeke & The Wheel; Corey Morrow: The Man That
I've Been; The Best Of Norma Jean; Hank Penny: Hollywood Western Swing,
1944-47; Elvis Presley: 50,000,000 Elvis Fans Can't Be Wrong; John Prine:
In Spite Of Ourselves; Ole Rasmussen: Sleepy Eyed John; Leon Rausch: Close
To You; Red Dirt Rangers: Ranger's Command; The Otis Redding Story;
Sawtooth: Sawtooth; John Sebastian & The J Band: Chasin' Gus' Ghost;
Whitey Shafer: My Perfect World; Rick Shea: Shaky Ground; Stop The Truck:
Two Step Program; Jim Stringer & The AM Band: Swang!; Texas Belairs:
Sons Of Preachers; John Train: Angels Turned Thieves; Trout Fishing In
America: Closer To The Truth; VA: Rockabilly Western Gospel Hymns; VA:
Tejano Country Christmas; VA: Lone Star Stomp; Dale Watson: People I've
Known, Places I've Been; The Essential Dottie West; West Coast Pinups:
Woman's Work; Hank Williams: Live At The Grand Ole Opry

FAR charts are compiled from reports sent in by actual DJs with freeform (ie
no playlists) radio shows on public, college and community stations round
the country (and in Australia). Each of them lists the four albums they took
most pleasure in playing, one of which they can name as their Album of the
Month (designated by a * and their initials).

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LB: Len Brown WDVR, NJ
BC: Bill Conner, KNBT, TX
KD: Ken Date, 2RRR, Australia
PD: Paul Daly, KSYM, TX
JE: Julie Espy, KUCI, CA
BF: Bill Frazer, KRCB, CA
DF: Dan Ferguson, WRIU, RI
SG: Steve Gardner, WXDU, NC
JH: Jamie Hoover, KGLP, NM
JLH: John Hauser, KOOP, TX
SH: Steve Hathaway, KKUP, CA

WH: Wade Hockett, KBOO, OR
DJ: David John, KTRU, TX
TJ: Tom Jackson, WLUW, IL
JP: Jana Pendragon KXLU, CA
PP: Professor Purple, KZMU, UT
ER: Eddie Russell, RPEN/JRRI
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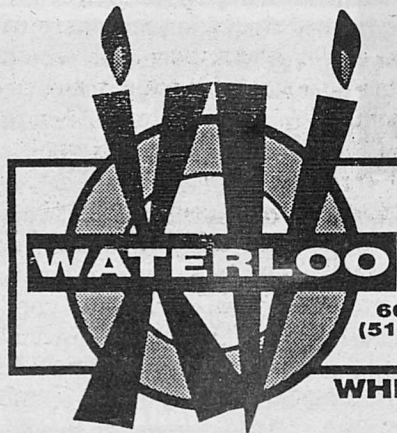
7th	Texana Dames
8th	Teri Joyce & The Tagalongs
9th	Genre Benders
14th	Sisters Morales
15th	Shelley King Band
16th	Skeleton Crew
21st	TBA + (5.30pm) Penny Jo Pullus
22nd	Kevin Fowler Band
23rd	Mitzi Henry & The Texas Trildusters
28th	LeRoi Brothers + (5.30pm) The Belfuries
29th	Roger Wallace + (6.30pm) Dee Lannon
30th	John Godfrey Blues Band

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THE TEXAS PLAINSMEN w/YODELIN' DONNIE WALSER

(Walser Archive Recordings ****)

Greater love hath no writer than that he fork out his own money for a review copy (see editorial), and, offhand, I can think of very few, if any, people I'd have done this for other than Don Walser. A labor of love by Mark Rubin and Wayne Nagel, this nifty little package draws on transcriptions, specifically from April and August 1964, of a regular Saturday afternoon live radio show Walser and The Texas Plainsmen played on KJBC, Midland. Walser, 30 at the time, had moved from Lamesa in 1959 and answered an ad for a singer to front a band being put together by fiddler James O'Neill, which eventually included Carl Echols on drums, Warren Powell steel guitar and Billy Richter, who'd been in Walser's first band, The Panhandle Playboys, electric guitar, but which never had a bass player. All of them worked for a living, Walser as a National Guard mechanic, the others in various branches of the oil and gas industry, and The Texas Plainsmen only played on weekends, mostly lodges and private parties, with a few honky tonks. Which is a roundabout way of saying it was a semipro operation, and even John Morthland's liner notes acknowledge that "Both the band and the tapes are imperfect." Walser himself had yet to reach his peak as a singer and the versions of songs he still performs, *Rolling Stone From Texas*, *Begging To You*, *Cowpoke*, *Don't Worry* and *Casting My Lasso* only suggest what he would do with them later in his career. That said, even if it derives much of its charm from the homespun plugs for the band's sponsors, this is a missing chapter in the Walser saga. Do I regret paying \$7 for this? No way. Would I pay \$14.99 for it? Absolutely. Would I say it's a great record? Not a chance. Would I part with it? Not hardly. **JC**

LI'L MO & THE MONICATS HEARTS IN MY DREAM

(Passin Fancy ****)

Making her move rather late in the year, Monica Passin walks away with my vote for Best Original Country Song of 1999. It may not hurt that *Still Cryin'* features Fats Kaplin on fiddle (and jew's harp) or Tony Trischka on banjo, but Passin demonstrates right there that she can write and deliver outstanding country music in the classic mold. And she has at least one follow-up A side in *It Just Doesn't Add Up*. Her eponymous 1997 debut came across, very appealingly, as a one woman jukebox, a collection of handcrafted singles rather than just another album, the fact that she's based in New York City adding a dash of exoticism. This time round, she retains very much the same 'Greatest Hits' feel but has risen to a whole new, even more impressive, level. Opening with George Jones' *Hearts In My Dream* (Passin's country epiphany, incidentally, was the 1960 LP *George Jones Salutes Hank Williams*), she also covers Jean Shepard's nut-cutter *Twice The Lovin' (In Half The Time)*, The Everly Brothers' *The Sun Keeps Shining* and Monicat upright bassplayer (also coproducer with Passin, and engineer) Hank Bones' *I'm Still Walkin'*, the other seven tracks, including, of course, the wonderful *Still Cryin'*, being originals. The only flaw in an otherwise very fine album is the dopey closing track, *I Will Give My Love*, but otherwise Passin is a shining example of the real benefit of alt.country—it provides a shelter for people who still practice the art of real country. **JC**

CHRIS GAFFNEY & THE COLD HARD FACTS LIVE AND THEN SOME

(Tres Pescadores, double CD ****)

Had I not already committed the cover, Gaffney's combo offering of his 1986 EP *The Road To Indio* with a full-length album recorded live in March 1999 at the Swallow Inn, San Juan Capistrano, would have been a serious contender. Guess I'll have to wait for his Dave Alvin-produced album, due this summer from Hightone, on which I'll get a little more advance notice. I need to have the reflective shit for June or July or whenever, meantime let's just say that I think very well of Chris Gaffney and this package does nothing to hurt him. The original idea was to pad out the seven-song *Road To Indio*, bring it up to standard CD length, but after recording 83 songs over two nights, it seemed easier to throw in another 14 cut CD, so along with the collector's item debut, you get what Gaffney describes as "This is how we sound when you're drinking." Fairly demented versions of such Gaffney and/or Alvin material as *Six Nights A Week*, *Frank's Tavern*, *Fight (Tonight's The Night)*, *Fade To Grey*, *East Of Houston*, *West Of Baton Rouge*, *King Of The Blues* and '68, include Gaffney's *Waltz To Minnie* one of the six minute set pieces, along with Joe Ely's *Are You Listenin' Lucky*, complete with the guitar solo from Deep Purple's *Highway Star*. Other covers include Jimmie Dale Gilmore's *Dallas*, (Queen) Ida Guillory's *Every Now And Then* and the Cal Smith country hit *The Lord Knows I'm Drinkin'*. Hey, Steve, drag Gaffney's ass here for South By South Austin will ya? **JC**

CHARLINE ARTHUR WELCOME TO THE CLUB

(Bear Family [Germany] ****)

Unlike Kitty Wells, who played the part of a honky tonker without actually being one, or Rose Maddox, who had the enormous advantage of basing her career in California, Charline Arthur, born in a boxcar in Henrietta, TX, tried to be the real thing, an independent, outspoken, sexually aggressive female country artist in postwar Nashville. She lost. She lost so bad that instead of being revered as one of country music's all-time greats, she's only remembered by advanced students of honky tonk and proto-rockabilly. Though signed to RCA after only two singles, one on Bullet, the other on Imperial, she clashed early and often with Chet Atkins, "He always had songs he wanted me to record that I didn't want to record and I had ones I'd written that he wouldn't let me record." After one such run-in, she was dropped and, branded as 'difficult,' ie having a mind of her own, the kiss of death for any female performer, was shunned by other majors. She wound up broke, bitter and disillusioned in a trailer home in Pocatello, Idaho, dying, at 58, a year after the original 1987 LP release of this album. While, for Arthur's sake, I despise Atkins with every fibre of my being, even his fans would have to concede that he was not the ideal producer or guitarist for a pre-rockabilly honky tonker, and there's a very distinct difference between the insubstantial lameass backings with Atkins and the much grittier ones without him. Even so, Arthur's exuberant, sexy, in your face, barroom holler still enthralls on numbers like *Kiss The Baby Goodnight*, *I'm Having A Party All By Myself*, *Leave My Man Alone*, *Just Look, Don't Touch*, *He's Mine*, *Welcome To The Club*, *Burn That Candle*, *The Good And The Bad*, *Flash Your Diamonds* and *What About Tomorrow*. Much admired by Elvis, Arthur, the first to wear slacks on stage, when other Nashville women, including Kitty Wells, were still in gingham dresses, was, of course, primarily a victim of 50s American sexism, but even if she came along today, she'd still encounter artistic dim bulbs like Atkins—plus ça change, plus ça la même shit. For all that Bear Family have kept her legacy alive (the 32 tracks encompass all but two of Arthur's recordings), it has to be said that the sequencing makes so little sense it might almost have been done at random. **JC**

RONNY ELLIOTT MY NERVES ARE BAD TONIGHT

(Blue Heart ****)

By the time a new musical genre acquires a label, it invariably has a pre-history that gets occluded. Bill Haley, for instance, did not invent rock & roll, but he'd do way better in word association than Roy Brown, Jackie Brenston or Ike Turner. Similarly, as David Goodman puts it, "When Ronny Elliott reads about the 90s roots rock 'explosion,' he might smile and say, 'been there, done that.' He began playing roots rock/Americana in Tampa, Florida in the mid-60s." Elliott's neighbors in *Modern Twang* are Betty Elders and Joe Ely, and one might say he has more in common with both than they do with each other, a sort of intelligent, introspective country rock, informed by four decades of road philosophy and experience and leavened by sardonic wit, all of which come together on his extremely idiosyncratic list of *Heroes*. However, the song that seems, judging by my email, to have resonated with many people is *South By So What*, "We flew half way cross the country to shake and to rattle and I was ready to roll when we got to Liberty Lunch. Trying to be hip for the press was more than half the battle. Those jerks from *No Depression* are an arrogant bunch. And it's South By So What in the city of Austin." Gotta love him. Elliott's been round a lot of blocks, and brought back a lot of stories and wisdom. **JC**

THE VERY BEST OF ROBBIE FULKS

(Bloodshot **)

Given the level of skepticism in alt.country circles about Fulks' multi-album major label deal, there must have been a fair amount of 'Told you so' when Geffen yanked the promotion budget for *Let's Kill Saturday Night* even before it was released. While Fulks can hardly be blamed for taking advantage of Geffen's misjudgment, one still has to wonder why they took on an artist who'd made a name for himself in 'Insurgent Country' and had him, or let him, make a pop-rock album, which inevitably sank without trace. Equally, one has to wonder what Fulks will do now he's back in the world, and I hope it's rather better than what he offers here. Originally self-released, this is a grabbag of odds and ends, demos and outtakes, as Fulks himself observes, "stowed away in the untrodden badlands of walk-in closets, barely navigable crawlspaces and the like." Which is where many of these excursions into pop, country, rock, bluegrass, novelty and movie mood music belong. There are some good moments, *I Just Want To Meet The Man*, from the point of view of an ex-husband/boyfriend making a total, unashamed jerk of himself, and the wickedly satiric *Roots Rock Weirdos*, but for the main part, this is the downside of Fulks' erratic talent. Committed fans get the bonus of a 'secret' track, his attempt to breathe life into the turgid chestnut *Leaving On A Jet Plane*. **JC**



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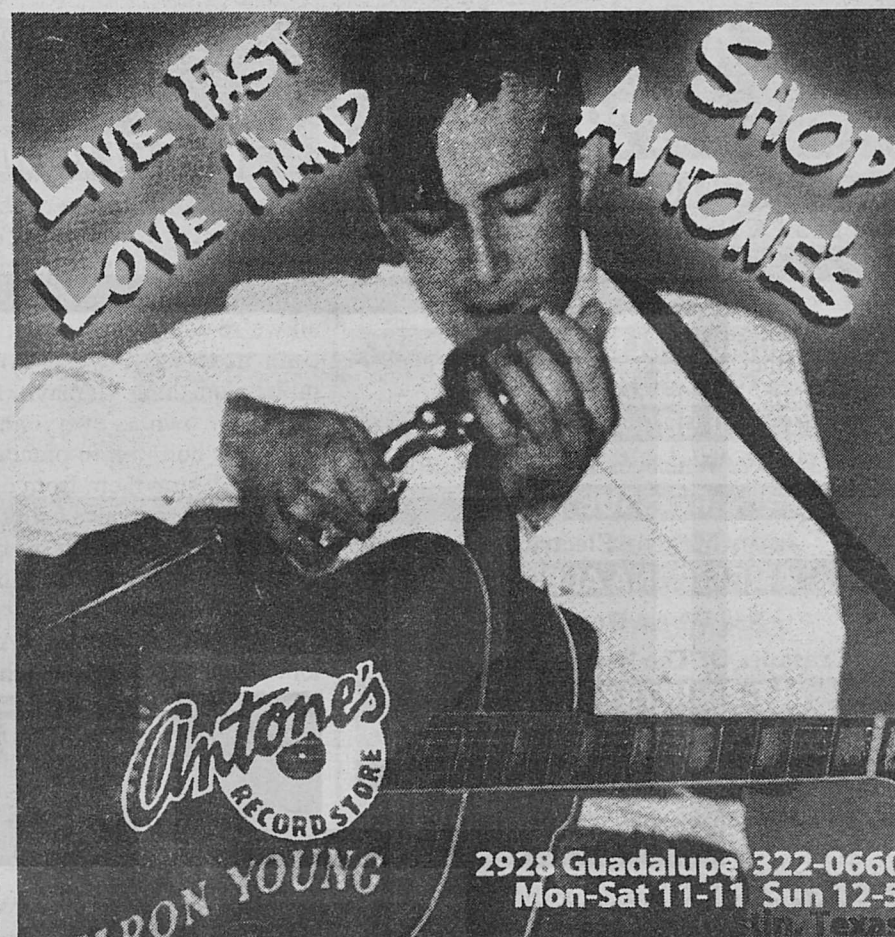
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DAVIS RAINES Hell For Breakfast

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ROGER WALLACE

MUSIC BOOK

DAVID GOODMAN Modern Twang (2nd edition)

First off, I'm one of those boring people who insist—correctly, which is even more boring of us—that the decade, century and millennium don't end until the end of this year. So all we're doing here is looking at 1999. Maybe this time next year, we'll do the decade/century/millennium thing. Or maybe not. In theory, we should be on our own as everyone else will already have shot their bolt, but in practice I can't help thinking that won't stop them from doing it all over again.

Initially, I sent out a ballot to all the FAR reporters with the categories you see over there (except I gave myself Texas so I'd have somewhere to put Terry Allen). This didn't work out too good—the best way to describe the FAR gang is as a pack of lone wolves. Trying to get them moving in anything

like the same direction was, to scramble my similes, like herding cats. Also, there was too much flexibility, allowing for tactical voting. The same artists could, and did, show up in several different categories, getting a lot of overall support without doing real well in any one of them.

To give you some idea, with a college of 32 voters, I ended up with well over 150 nominations—and that doesn't include Outstanding Tracks. If FAR was a label and everyone had their way, we'd have put out about 300 singles last year.

My error, of course, was to try and come up with a structured result, when the operative word in this whole deal is 'Freeform.' So, fuck it, I dumped the categories and simply added up all the separate votes, and this is how it came out.

JC

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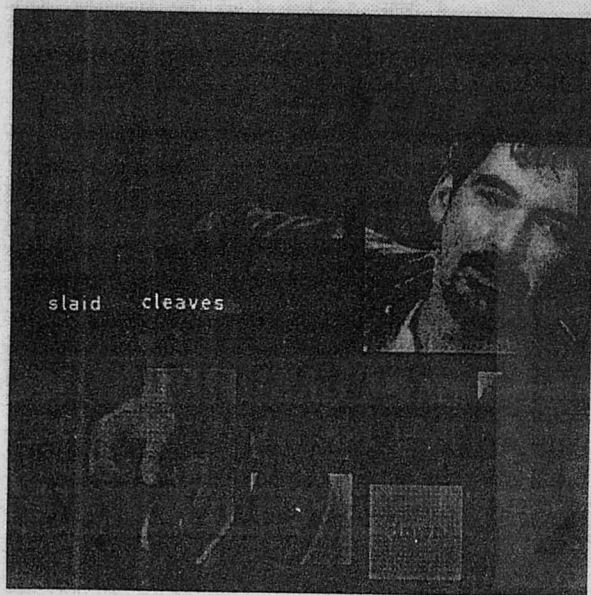
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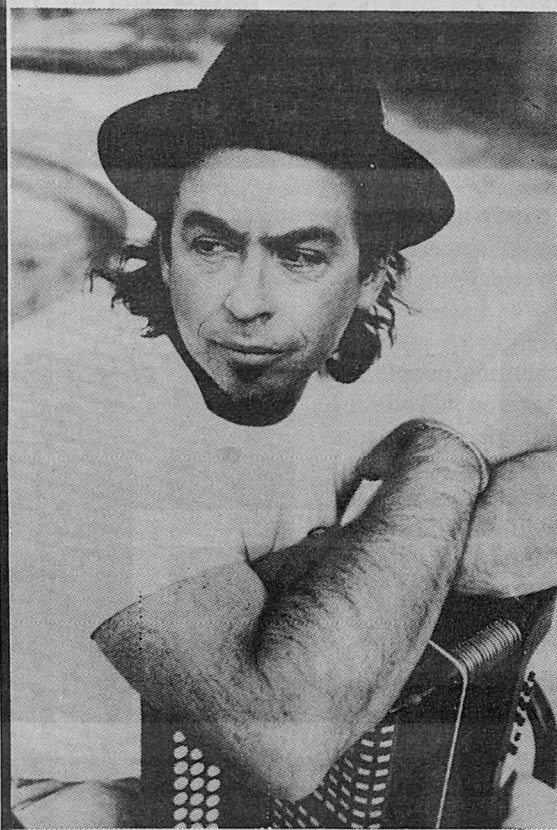
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JOHN THE REVELATOR

Reporting on the December 1st Antone's benefit for Tary Owens, the *American-Statesman* told us, "The blues also dominated the rest of the benefit, save for **Don Walser's** warm and welcome set early in the show." A reader, there for the entire evening, was a little puzzled by this as he didn't recall seeing Walser, "and he's kind of hard to miss." The problem here is that, though he was scheduled to play, Walser didn't make it because he and Pat couldn't find anywhere to park within Don's limited walking range. So, if you don't recall seeing him either, your memory and eyesight are just fine.

♦ The reason Mark Rubin is charging people for review copies of **The Texas Plainsmen w/Yodelin' Donnie Walser** (see Reviews and editorial) is that he's determined that, for a change, Walser should actually make some money off one of his records. Not available in any store, this will only be sold at Walser's gigs and through www.donwalser.com. To give some perspective on Walser's experiences with labels, Watermelon, from whom he never received a royalty statement, let alone royalties, are now claiming he owes them money, and all I can say is I wish I'd been a fly on the wall when they ran that one past Pat Walser.

♦ Those of you who saw a letter in the *Austin Chronicle* attacking **Mark Rubin** ("pompous and arrogant . . . average at best") might ought to know that its author, **Mark Horn**, for reasons of his own, failed to disclose the fact that he's a drummer, currently with The Derailers, which, of course, sheds a whole new light on his diatribe, now occupying pride of place on the home page of Rubin's website.

♦ Haven't had a chance to dissect the new glossy, full-color quarterly *Texas Music*, as I ain't willing to spring \$3.95 for a copy of what looks like a pretty superficial enterprise. Not to mention, speaking from my own experience in trying to give away copies of a Texas music magazine, a doomed one. Had they asked me, I could have told them the big snag about Texas music is that there's no fucking money in it. I'll be surprised if there's a second issue and astonished if they make it as far as a third.

♦ May be a bit late, but the December 10th issue of *Texas Observer* had an excellent feature on **KOOP**. However, I had to take exception to Michael King's contention that KOOP going under wouldn't hurt Austin radio, as nobody else plays the musics Rod Moag, John Hauser and Tom Mahnke cover. Do good guys at the turntables excuse vile mismanagement? King say no way, I confess to ambivalence.

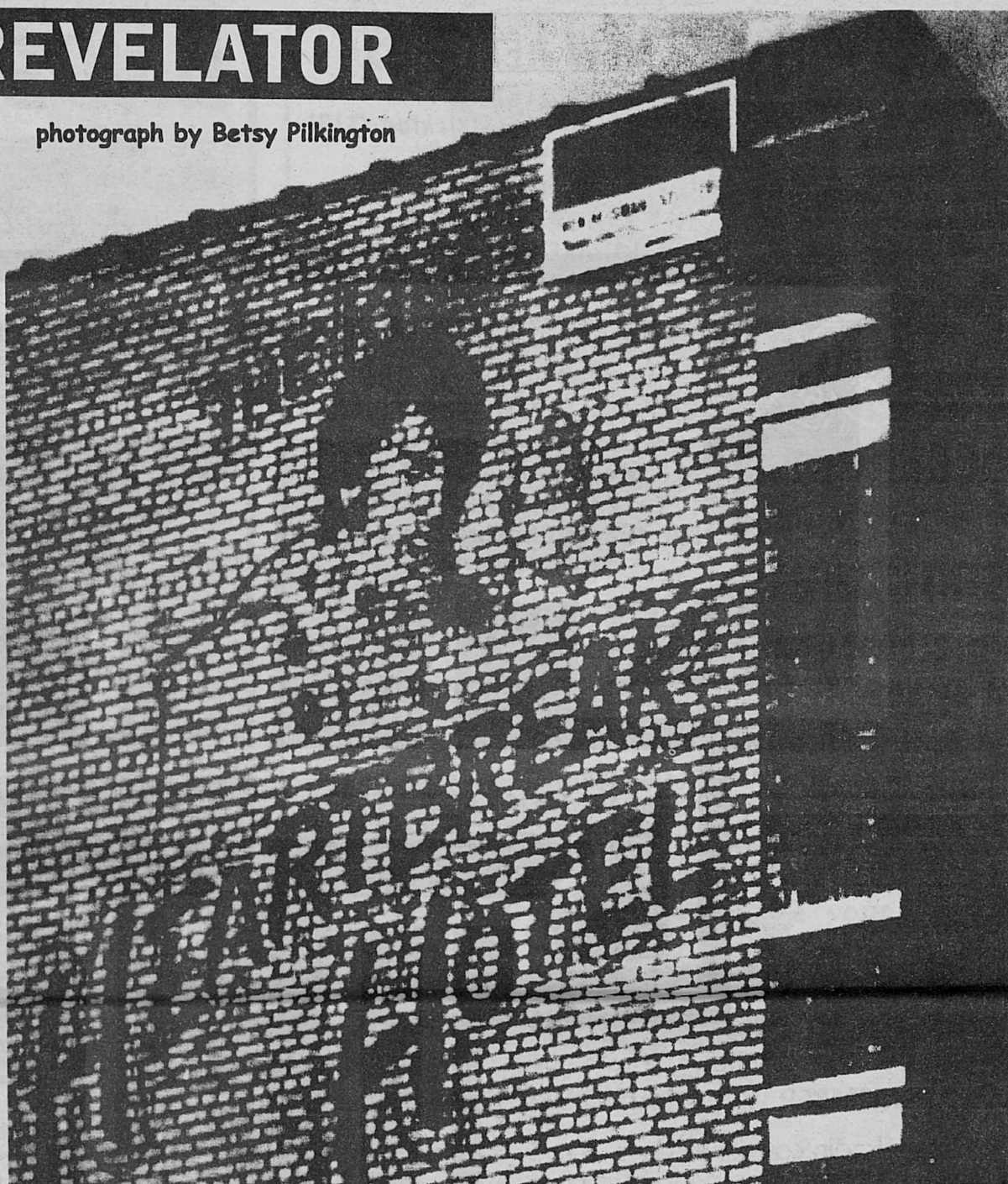
♦ I've decided God doesn't exist, because if She did, surely She'd have scrapped the whole Mankind project and started over when she heard the horrible music being played on New Year's Eve. If Faith Hill and Enrique Iglesias, Eagles and Bee Gees reunions are the culmination of 2000 years, I'd say it's time to back to the drawing board.

FAR

Some new characters on board this month, **Julie 'Wanda' Espy**, *Howdylicious*, KUCI, Irvine, CA; **Steve Gardner**, *Topsoil*, WXDU, Durham, NC; and **Bill Frater**, *Freight Train Boogie*, KRCB, Santa Rosa, CA.

♦ Last month, many FARsters reported **Doug Sahm** albums, played in tribute. However, they reported so many different titles that only **The Best of Doug Sahm & The Sir Douglas Quintet 1968-1975** would've registered on the chart. So I lumped them together under 'Various' which brought the aggregate up to #2. I admit this was something of an end run, but I don't think it amounted to actual manipulation and I think you'll agree it was a special case.

photograph by Betsy Pilkington



♦ In 1999, we lost Leon 'Pappy' Selph (84, Jan 8), Charles Brown (78, Jan 21), Jimmy Day (65, Jan 22), Bobby Troup (80, Feb 7), Buddy Knox (65, Feb 14), Dusty Springfield (59, Mar 2), Lowell Fulson (77, Mar 7), Joe Williams (80, Mar 29), Jesse Stone (97, Apr 3), Ella Mae Morse (75, Oct 16), Hoyt Axton (62, Oct 26), Doug Sahm (58, Nov 18), Don 'Sugarcane' Harris (61, Dec 1), Rick Danko (56, Dec 10), Rex Allen (78, Dec 12), Marion Worth (64, Dec 19), Hank Snow (83, Dec 20) and Curtis Mayfield (57, Dec 26).

♦ One passing you may have missed is that of **Grady Owen** who died November 16th in the Philippines, aged 66. Though he was only a Blue Cap (rhythm guitar, bass, vocals and 'clapper boy') for the band's final year, 1958, he played on three albums, which featured several of his songs, notably *Lovely Loretta*, appeared on several TV specials and was in the cult movie **Hot Rod Gang**. Owen also roomed with Gene, getting an extra \$10 a week for policing the clothes, shaving kits, watches, contracts, receipts, etc Vincent was always leaving behind. After The Blue Caps broke up, Grady made a living as a musician and songwriter for the next 30 years, performing solo and with other acts, including Johnny Carroll, and several of his songs were recorded by Sonny James and others. Grady himself can be heard singing his own *I Don't Feel Like Rockin' Tonight*, on **Gene Vincent & The Blue Caps: The Lost Dallas Sessions** (Dragon Street). His nephew, Chris Owen, maintains a Grady Owen web page at www.athenet.net/~genevinc/GradyOwen.html.

2000 CALENDARS

Last month, I mentioned a cool sounding Chicago gig, Heather McAdams' Country Legends Calendar Brought To Life, with Kelly Hogan as Ricky Nelson, Robbie & Donna Fulks as Joe & Rose Lee Maphis, etc. Now, again thanks to FAR reporter Tom Jackson, I actually have a copy of **Heather's L'il Country Calendar 2000**, and it's a beautiful, seriously strange, thing, unlike any other calendar you've ever seen. McAdams seems equal parts country fan, college graduate and pop culture devotee, her idiosyncratic handdrawn creation, now in its 12th year, giving you a whole mess of birthdays you wouldn't exactly expect in a country music calendar (Picasso! Telly Savalas! Virginia Woolf! Ernie Kovaks! Carl Jung! PT Barnum! Faith Hill??). It's available for \$12 (+ \$1.50 p&h) from Chris & Heather's Record Roundup & Collectibles, 2034 W Montrose, Chicago, IL 60618 (773/271-5330).

♦ By contrast, **The Texas Musician 13 Month Millennium Leap-Year Calendar 2000** is very tightly focussed—it doesn't list *anybody* who wasn't actually born in Texas. Illustrated by the great photographs of Burton Wilson, including the classic pic of Doug Sahm holding out a bottle of Pearl, it has some 730 birthdays assembled from a variety of sources, including 3CM. Rather obviously a last minute project that cut corners, sometimes a little too sharply, this is, how shall I put it, basic? Minimalist? No frills? Available at Congress Avenue Booksellers and Antone's Record Store.



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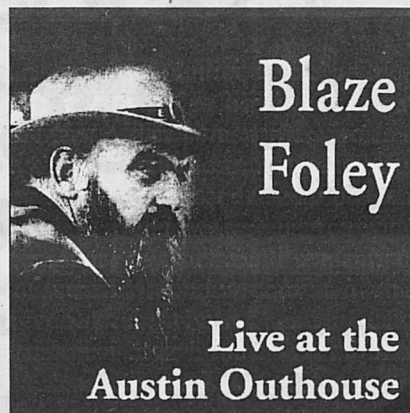
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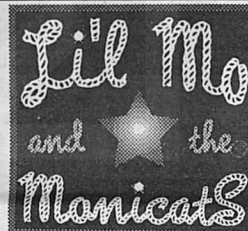
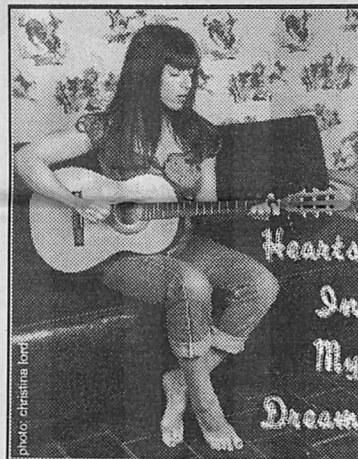


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REVIEW ME C.O.D.

Most every day, Henry the mailman brings me a couple three padded bags with promo CDs in them, which, as I'm not on the tit with any of the majors or even most of the indies, means people like the *Statesman* and the *Chronicle* must get them by the sackloads. Quantity aside, what we, and all other music reviewers, have in common is that we don't pay for them. Of course, this is true for any form of reviewing, even foodies have the restaurant tab picked up on expenses, but, sticking to the music side, the point is that when you read any album review, you're getting the opinion and reaction of somebody who hasn't shelled out one thin dime. Au contraire, selling review copies is a standard income supplement (if Garth Brooks objects, maybe he should try putting out albums reviewers want to keep). In fact, there's an Austin music mag, still listed in all the industry guides, which ceased publication a year ago and now exists only as a mail drop for promos sent in by people too dumb to figure out they haven't actually seen an issue lately.

♦ The problem, of course, is that the audience isn't in on this scam. Personally, I don't get enthusiastic about any album I don't intend to keep forever, which may not be the same as trying to figure whether it's really worth fifteen bucks, but realistically the best I can do. Unfortunately, this approach fails when you're dealing with multiple contributors, individually sincere but collectively not a whole lot of help. Go diligently through the reviews in *No Depression* or *Blue Suede News*, two of the better journals around, and you'll wind up with a list of dozens, scores, of recommended albums, many of them mediocre at best and some utter dogshit. It's as if they can't bring themselves to be ugly about something they've been given for free—*Country Standard Time* is a striking example of this syndrome. To be sure, labels are known to cut off promos, and advertising, from periodicals that run less than enthusiastic reviews, but that's no excuse for shortchanging the readers.

♦ When Mark Rubin made me cough up \$7 for a review copy of *The Texas Plainsmen w/Yodelin' Donnie Walser* (see Reviews), he wasn't setting a precedent—Fantasy have long charged for review copies and I'm told writers who wanted the massive Ellington retrospective had to pony up \$150—but this was the first time I'd dealt with no pay, no play. One difficulty, in this instance, is that it penalizes Walser's core supporters in the media (I was first in line and, so far, *No Depression* have been the only other takers), but I have to admit it could revolutionize reviewing as we know it.

♦ Imagine if this became industry practice, if labels sent out advance schedules that included artist, title, release date and price, if we reviewers were put in the same basic situation, even at a discount, as you punters. First off, instead of casually thinking, "Oh, that sounds vaguely interesting, I'll put in for a copy of that," we'd have to devise investment strategies, weigh the odds, study the form, play the hunches. This would be real hard on those of us who prefer the outsiders to the favorites, but it would sure focus our thinking.

♦ The upside would be that reviewers would have to start thinking in terms of value for money, and I imagine you'd see an awful lot of reviews that concluded, "I wuz robbed!" And, come to think, it would get rid of that dumbass "Promotional copy not for resale, must be returned on request" bullshit.

♦ Of course, this ain't going to happen, there's way too much product out there and way too many acts and labels desperate for any kind of notice (the rule of thumb, incidentally, is that if a promo sells just one copy, it's justified itself). Still, I'm making a New Year's resolution—to keep asking myself if I'd've paid for this sucker (and if so, how much).

JC

THE BIG "D" JAMBOREE

(Dragon Street, double CD *****)

Now that its musical decline has gone from observable trend to obvious fact, it's worth bearing in mind that Austin had pretty much the standard Texas run, 20 odd years. Aside from the special case of Fort Worth's Western Swing, in the two decades before WW2, San Antonio, with a virtual monopoly on recording, ruled; in the two after, it was Dallas' turn (by rights, Houston should be next). In fact, at one time, before Nashville broke away from the postwar pack, it really did look as if Dallas might become a major country music center, and one reason was The Big 'D' Jamboree, held at and broadcast from the Sportatorium at Cadiz & Industrial every Saturday night for almost 20 years. Promoter Ed McLemore may have had the most mercenary of motives to keep his stadium bringing in money on a non-wrestling night, but he nonetheless earned, and deserves, a special place in the affections of fans of 50s American music, from the rawest of hillbilly through vintage country to the most frantic rockabilly and early rock & roll.

♦ Taking over from a postwar hillbilly variety show, The Big D Jamboree made its KRLD debut on October 16, 1948 and, if never quite as famous as the Grand Ole Opry, National Barn Dance or Louisiana Hayride, quickly became one of the biggest, best and most popular of the regional radio barn dances, drawing sellout live audiences of 5000 people each and every Saturday night between 1949 and 1959. Among the regulars at various times were Lefty Frizzell, Ray Price, Hank Lochlin, Charline Arthur and Sonny James, while guest artists included everyone from Hank Williams to Elvis Presley. In 1951, Marvin 'Smokey' Montgomery brought Fort Worth's renowned Lightcrust Doughboys, including fiddler Carroll Hubbard, guitarist Lefty Perkins and pianist/steel guitarist Paul Blunt, to the Jamboree as the *second* house band (an augmented version of which is featured as The Texas Stompers).

♦ The Big D folded in the mid-60s, but it outlasted most other barn dances by enthusiastically embracing and promoting rockabilly and early rock & roll, and these two albums, mainly derived from 1956-59 transcriptions of CBS' national *Saturday Night Country Style*, of which The Big D was a rotating segment, are, give or take some ambiguity, evenly divided between the show's Hillbillies and Rockabillicies. One of the great difficulties in putting albums like these together is negotiating rights, but whatever Dragon Street's David Dennard had to give up on, he still managed to acquire rising star performances by Johnny Cash, Cowboy Copas, Ferlin Husky, Wanda Jackson, Carl Perkins, Warren Smith and Gene Vincent. Of particular interest are two tracks by the great Charline Arthur, which, as far as I know, are the only recordings of her available on a US label (there is—naturally—a Bear Family CD, see Reviews). If the names of many of the other performers, some of them, such as Ronnie Dee (better known later in life as Ronnie Dawson), graduates of the Big D's own talent contests, are unfamiliar, the show's main host, DJ Johnny Hicks, once remarked, "It was a little embarrassing because from time to time local people—especially the local kids—would get more applause than some of the guest stars."

♦ *Hillbillies*, which includes part of a 1950 Falstaff Beer sponsored show with Jimmy Heap & The Melody Masters (*Carbon Copy*) and, shortly before she joined Bob Wills, Ramona Reed (*If I Could Only Learn To Yodel*), features Cowboy Copas (*Tragic Romance*), Ferlin Husky (*Aladdin's Lamp*), Hank Lochlin (*A Good Woman's Love and You Can't Never Tell*), Leon Payne (*I Love You Because*), pre-rockabilly Wanda Jackson (*No Wedding Bells For Joe*), Orville Crouch (*King For A Day and Overnight*) and Charline Arthur (*Welcome To The Club and What About Tomorrow?*), who could just as well have been on the rockabilly disc, as could headliner Johnny Cash (*So Doggone Lonesome, I Walk The Line, Get Rhythm*).

♦ *Rockabillicies* is bookended by two giants, Carl Perkins (*That's All Right, Blue Suede Shoes, Slippin' & Slidin', I Got A Woman, Everybody's Tryin' To Be My Baby*) and Gene Vincent & His Blue Caps (*Blue Jean Bop, Whole Lotta Shakin' Goin' On, Dance To The Bop and Lotta Lovin'*). Apart from Warren Smith (*Black Jack David*—rather oddly Smith claims, to an audience which might well remember earlier versions by T Texas Tyler and Cliff Carlisle, that he wrote it—*Hound Dog* and *Rock & Roll Ruby*) and Jerry Reed (*Mr Whiz*), most of the other acts are local heroes for whom The Big D was such an invaluable proving ground, Johnny Carroll (*Suzy Q, I'll Wait*), Groovy Joe Poovey (*Move Around*), Sid King & The Five Strings (*Booger Red*), Werly Fairburn (*All By Myself*), Johnny Dollar with teenage prodigy CB Oliver on piano (*Great Balls Of Fire*—incidentally, rockabilly fans who don't have Dollar's fabulous *Mr Action Packed*, also on Dragon Street, are their own worst enemy) and Ronnie Dee & The D Men (*30 Days, Johnny B Goode*).

♦ The magic of albums like these is that they capture moments that can never be recreated. When Cash, Perkins and Vincent performed at The Big D, they were not legends but young men in their early to mid 20s, and the songs they performed—these were the days when acts toured to promote singles not albums—were freshly minted. Even the lesser-known support acts were still inspired by as yet undashed hopes of stardom. Either way, all the artists on these albums were giving it everything they had.

JC

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 ----- Charlie Waller • 1935 • Hendersonville, TX
 ----- Phil Everly • 1939 • Brownie, KY
 ----- Janis Joplin • 1943 • Port Arthur, TX
- 20th Leadbelly • 1889 • Mooringsport, LA
 ----- Whistling Alex Moore † 198
 ----- Buster Benton † 1996
- 21st Smith Ballew • 1902 • Palestine, TX
 ----- Snooks Eaglin • 1936 • New Orleans, LA
 ----- Wolfman Jack • 1939 • Brooklyn, NY
 ----- Jackie Wilson † 1984
- 22nd Sam Cooke • 1935 • Chicago, IL
 ----- Shawn Young • 1968 • CO
 ----- Jimmy Day † 1999
- 23rd Django Reinhardt • 1910 • Liverchies, Belgium
 ----- Tom Wildcat Courtney • 1929 • Waco, TX
 ----- Lisa Pankratz • 1968 • Austin, TX
 ----- Tuts Washington • 1907 • New Orleans, LA
 ----- Jack Scott • 1936 • Windsor, Canada
 ----- Doug Kershaw • 1936 • Tiel Ridge, LA
 ----- Aaron Neville • 1941 • New Orleans, LA
 ----- Tex Thomas • 1951 • Littlefield, TX
 ----- Paul Robeson † 1976
- 24th Gene Austin † 1972
- 25th Jimmy Wyble • 1922 • Port Arthur, TX
 ----- Speedy West • 1924 • Springfield, MO
 ----- Etta James • 1938 • Los Angeles, CA
 ----- Laura Lee McBride † 1989
- 26th Dennis McGee • 1893 • Bayou Marron, LA
 ----- Claude Gray • 1932 • Henderson, TX
 ----- Huey 'Piano' Smith • 1934 • New Orleans, LA
 ----- Lucinda Williams • 1953 • Lake Charles, LA
- 27th Joe Shelton • 1911 • Hopkins Co, TX
 ----- Andrew 'Smokey' Hogg • 1914 • Westconnie, TX
 ----- Elmore James • 1918 • Richland, MS
 ----- Moon Mullican † 1967
 ----- Mahalia Jackson † 1972
- 28th Blind Arvella Gray • 1906 • Somerville, TX
 ----- Carl White • 1932 • Dallas, TX
 ----- Carolyn Hester • 1938 • Waco, TX
 ----- Al Dexter † 1984
 ----- T Texas Tyler † 1972
- 29th Al Stricklin • 1908 • Antioch, TX
- 30th Ruth Brown • 1928 • Portsmouth, VA
 ----- Paul Glasse • 1959 • Poughkeepsie, NY
 ----- Mance Lipscomb † 1976
 ----- Professor Longhair † 1980
 ----- Warren Smith † 1980
 ----- Lightnin' Hopkins † 1982
- 31st Chuck Willis • 1928 • Atlanta, GA
 ----- Slim Harpo † 1970

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